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Ms K Thomas
Principal
Oldham College
Rochdale Road
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Dear Ms Thomas

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff during my visit on 09 October 2008 to look at success factors in promoting equality and improving the outcomes for learners from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included meetings with college staff, meetings with students, observation of teaching and learning, scrutiny of documentation

The quality of provision to promote equalities for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds is outstanding.

Features of good practice and success factors observed

- One of the key strengths of the college is the embedding of the equality and diversity work. For many learners attending The Oldham College it is the first time they have been in an ethnically diverse environment as many of the local schools are single culture schools such as Bangladeshi, Pakistani or white British. The college runs celebrating diversity awards in the autumn term each year as a means of educating learners about each others' cultures and breaking down barriers to learning. By directly involving teaching staff and learners, and by infusing many aspects of the college curriculum in the autumn term, the competition breathes life and relevance into the key aims of the college's Equality and Diversity policy.

- An example of this is the design crafts team, where first year learners work in pairs and focus on their own story so the learners get to know each other well. Each second year learner has chosen a country to research and in addition to researching homes and clothes they will also research into politics, religion and economic development.
- The positive culture of promoting diversity has been embedded through strong commitment by senior managers and governors to drive forward these agendas. This includes strong and effective representation of black and minority ethnic heritage through long serving governors, who provide well respected links with the local and wider community and act as excellent role models.
- The college plays a leading role in Oldham's Community Cohesion Strategy. It has led local and regional multi agency projects working with the Learning Partnership, community groups such as Fatima and the Pakistani Centre and it is a sponsor of community events.
- A major focus for the college is the Young Professional (YP) scheme whereby successful learners are used as role models and come back to the college to do presentations to inspire current learners. A significant number of black and minority ethnic learners are used as positive role models in their YP marketing literature, which sends out powerful messages to the community and helps to influence choice.
- As a result of this sustained effort across all areas of the college, there has been a significant increase in the number of learners going onto higher education (HE), and success rates for black and minority ethnic learners have increased significantly. For long courses the overall success rate for black and minority ethnic learners is now the same as that of white British learners.
- College staff make excellent use of the rich data they collect. They analyse the data to identify problem areas and then put measures in place to improve the issue. For example, a male Bangladeshi cohort was identified as having lower success and retention rates when compared to national data. It was decided to target this group and provide additional support as well as looking at the issues that might have a negative impact on their success at college. The support had a positive impact and those learners who had support did better than those who did not have additional support.

Areas for development

- The excellent work of embedding the celebrating diversity scheme into the whole curriculum in design crafts could usefully be shared as good practice across the whole college. Some areas of the college are very good at promoting equality and diversity through the curriculum but the practice is not consistent across all areas.
- I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in the college.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local LSC and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Swift
Her Majesty's Inspector